DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 471 788 CS 511 600

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TITLE Improving Fourth Grade Students' Writing Skills and Attitudes.

PUB DATE 2002-05-00

NOTE 52p.; Master of Arts Research Project, Saint Xavier University and SkyLight Professional Development Field-Based Program.

PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Action Research; Grade 4; *Instructional Effectiveness; Intermediate Grades; Journal Writing; Modeling (Psychology); *Process Approach (Writing); Teacher Behavior; *Writing Attitudes; *Writing Improvement; Writing Skills

IDENTIFIERS Illinois

ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving writing skills and related attitudes towards writing of elementary students. The target population consisted of fourth grade students in stable middle to upper class suburban communities, located northwest of a large midwestern city. The problems of inadequate writing skills and poor writing attitudes were documented through writing rubrics, Illinois Standards Achievement Tests, attitude surveys, and teacher observations. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students are exposed to inconsistent teaching methods, have a poor attitude toward writing, and lack sufficient opportunities to practice writing. Professional literature suggested a variety of causes including lack of rubric use, poor attitudes toward writing, inconsistent modeling of the writing process, and inability to synthesize writing skills. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of a writing process approach, which employed a variety of instructional strategies. These strategies include: administering pre- and post-student writing prompts and writing attitude surveys, using writing rubrics, modeling the writing process, exposing students to different varieties of writing, increasing writing frequency and duration, facilitating real and meaningful writing, and journaling weekly. Post-intervention data indicated increased student writing fluency, an improved composite score, and growth in students attitudes towards writing. Appendixes contain the fourth grade writing rubric, a survey instrument, a writing prompt, consent letters, and a description of the writing process. (Contains 31 references and 9 figures of data.) (Author/RS)

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ED 471 788

IMPROVING FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & Skylight Professional Development
Field Based Masters Program
Chicago, Illinois
May, 2002

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving writing skills and related attitudes towards writing of elementary students. The target population consisted of fourth grade students in stable middle to upper class suburban communities, located north west of a large midwestern city. The problems of inadequate writing skills and poor writing attitudes were documented through writing rubrics, Illinois Standards Achievement Tests, attitude surveys, and teacher observations.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students are exposed to inconsistent teaching methods, have a poor attitude toward writing, and lack sufficient opportunities to practice writing. Professional literature suggested a variety of causes including lack of rubric use, poor attitudes toward writing, inconsistent modeling of the writing process, and inability to synthesize writing skills.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of a writing process approach, which employed a variety of instructional strategies. These strategies include: administering pre- and post-student writing prompts and writing attitude surveys, using writing rubrics, modeling the writing process, exposing students to different varieties of writing, increasing writing frequency and duration, facilitating real and meaningful writing, and journaling weekly.

Post-intervention data indicated increased student writing fluency, an improved composite score, and growth in students attitudes towards writing.

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Acknowledgments

A special thank you to our families,
students and facilitators
for their cooperation and encouragement
during this Action Research Project.

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CHAPTER 1
IMPROVING FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

General Statement of Problem

The students of the targeted fourth grade classes exhibit weak writing skills that interfere with their overall writing achievement. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes low scores on the writing rubrics, low Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) writing scores, poor attitudes about writing, and teacher observation.

Local Context

Building A

A total of 194 students are enrolled in Building A. Of the 194 students, 80.9% are White, 5.2% are Black, .5% are Hispanic, and 13.4% are Asian/Pacific Islander. Low income students are 2.1% of the school's population, and 1.5% are Limited-English-Proficient. Building A has an attendance rate of 96.1%, mobility rate of 5.8%, and there is no chronic truancy (School Report Card, Building A, 2001).

The professional staff of this building numbers approximately 20. There are 19 teachers, including classroom teachers and special personnel. There is a school superintendent. Of those 19 teachers, 100% are White, and none are Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Native American. There are 79.7% female staff, and 20.3% male staff. The average number of years of experience of the professional staff is 15.5 years. There are 50.4% teachers who have Bachelor's degrees, and 49.6% who have Master's degrees or higher. The average teacher salary is $51,963. The pupil-teacher ratio is 10.6:1 for Building A (School Report Card, Building A, 2001).

Building A is located in a northwest suburban area of a large city in the midwestern United States. Building A is part of a district with grades kindergarten through eighth in attendance. The building was erected in 1930 and constructed of white brick. An addition was built in 1997, which added six new classrooms, a gymnasium, a stage, and an office area. The school has four entrances to a courtyard which is located in the center of the school. This center area was recently developed

by the students and teachers into a butterfly garden, and also contains a brick patio. Building A has a technology lab with a network of 24 Macintosh computers. Internet access is available on all computers in the lab. Each classroom also has at least one computer with both internet and network access. Each child must have an Internet permission form signed in order to work on the Internet.

The writing curriculum for Building A correlates with the Illinois State Standards. The school designed a rubric for use in grades first through third, and another rubric for grades four through eight. Teachers implement these standards using their own styles and techniques.

Building B

A total of 621 students are enrolled in Building B. Of the 621 students, 86.2% are White, 1.4% are Black, 4.8% are Hispanic, and 7.6% are Asian/Pacific Islander. Low income students make up 1.1% of the school's population, and 5.5% of the students are Limited-English-Proficient students. Building B has an attendance rate of 96.1%, mobility rate of 8.6%, and there is no chronic truancy (School Report Card, Building B, 2001).

The professional staff of District B numbers approximately 115 certified staff. This includes classroom teachers, special personnel, one assistant principal, and three principals. Of that population, 98.3% are White, and 1.7% are Asian/Pacific Islander. There are 88.1% female staff, and 11.9% male staff. The average number of years of experience of the professional staff in District B is 13 years. There are 54.7% of teachers who have Bachelor's degrees, and 45.3% who have Master's degrees or higher. The average teacher salary is $48,123. The pupil-teacher ratio is 19.5:1 for District B (School Report Card, Building B, 2001).

Building B is located in a northwest suburban area of a large city in the midwestern United States. Building B is one of two elementary schools in the district and houses identical grades of kindergarten through fifth. Building B was rebuilt in 1995. The new building housed four classrooms for each grade level except for kindergarten, in which two rooms were designated. In 2001, Building B had five sessions of kindergarten, and five classrooms of first, second, and third

grades. Grades four and five had four classrooms each. Building B also contained four classrooms for resource education and one classroom for gifted education.

The school is wired with a five year old Macintosh computer lab and each classroom houses four student iMacs and one teacher OS 8. The computer lab and all classroom computers are wired for Internet access and networked with all other buildings in the district. Each child must have an Internet permission form signed in order to work on the Internet. Four of the classrooms are wired with an overhead monitor that is connected to the teacher workstation.

District B is one of 14 schools in the First in the World Consortium. This entails the enhancement of curriculum with technology and businesses in the classroom. The district has trained all of its teachers in the engaged learning process. This type of learning stems from problem-based learning, where units are individually designed to fit the school, grade, or classroom.

The writing curriculum for Building B was adopted in 2001. The current program for grades kindergarten through second is Write Idea, 1999. The third and fourth grade curriculum is from Harcourt Brace, 1999. The fifth grade curriculum consists of Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

Building C

A total of 487 students are enrolled in Building C. Of the 487 students, 91.5% are White, 2.7% are Black, 0.8% are Hispanic, 3.1% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% are Native American. There are no low income students or Limited-English-Proficient students. Building C has a non-attendance rate, mobility rate, and no chronic truancy rate (Statistical Report, Building C, 2001).

The professional staff of this building numbers approximately 27. There are 25 teachers, including classroom teachers and special personnel. There are an assistant principal and principal. Of those 25 teachers, 100% are White, and there are no Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Native American teachers. There are 21 female staff, and three male staff. The average number of

years of experience of the professional staff is 14.6 years. There are 41% of teachers who have Bachelor's degrees, and 58.3% who have Master's degrees or higher. The average teacher salary is $25,600. The pupil-teacher ratio is 15:1 for Building C (Statistical Report, Building C, 2001).

Building C is a private, religious elementary school, and is located in a northwest suburban area of a large city in the midwestern United States. Building C houses an Early Childhood Program which includes three and four year old children. It also facilitates instruction for kindergarten through grade eight. It was founded in 1870 as part of a church effort to educate the children of European immigrants. The school's philosophy of providing religious instruction and an academically rich learning environment remains Building C's priority after 130 years. The building has undergone numerous changes, improvements, and expansions over the years to address the many needs of the growing and ever-changing environment. The current building consists of a multi-storied brick building with an interior courtyard. The latest addition to the structure was in 1990 when a new middle school wing and offices were added. An extensive computer lab, as well as Internet and cable access, are available. Networked computers are available in all classrooms and in the Learning Center. Each classroom also has its own telephone line with access to a message system and voice mail.

Building C is nationally and privately accredited, as well as recognized as a private school by the state. The National Excellence in Education Award was received in 1988. Building C's teachers have been recipients of numerous recognitions including the Golden Apple award, Those Who Excel, and District Teacher of the Year awards.

The writing program in Building C is incorporated into the language arts curriculum. The Illinois State Goals for Learning provide the basis for the curriculum. An English textbook provides eight areas of writing to implement instruction. Students are tested on standardized writing tests each year.

Building D

A total of 724 students are enrolled in Building D. Of the 724 students, 54% are White, 6.5% are Black, 27.5% are Hispanic, 11.7% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.3% are Native American. Low income students make up 28.7% of the school's population, and 25.4% are Limited-English-Proficient students. School D has an attendance rate of 95.5%, mobility rate of 17.2%, and there is no chronic truancy (School Report Card, Building D, 2001).

The professional staff of District D numbers 804. This is comprised of a superintendent, principals, assistant principals, building assistants, and teachers. Of the teachers, 95.3% are White, 0.8% are Black, 3.5% are Hispanic, 0.4% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and none are Native American. There are 84.7% female staff, and 15.3% male staff. The average number of years of experience of the professional staff in District D is 13.8 years. There are 46.3% teachers who have Bachelor's degrees, and 53.7% who have Master's degrees or higher. The average teacher salary is $54,287. The pupil-teacher ratio is 19.3:1 for Building D (School Report Card, 2001).

Building D is located in a northwest suburban area of a large city in the midwestern United States. Building D is part of a district with grades kindergarten through eighth in attendance. The school was founded in 1965. It is a one-story brick and cinder block building with a limited lower level and center courtyard. It has gone through two additions. In 1993, an office area, three full size classrooms, four small resource rooms, a kindergarten room, and a multipurpose room were added. Also, existing space was converted to include an area for bus access. In 2000, six full size classrooms were constructed and the multipurpose room was expanded. Building D houses a technology lab with 30 computers. It has a mini-lab with seven computers in the Resource Center. In addition, each classroom is equipped with two to four computers. Building D is networked with Netscape Communicator, Internet Explorer, GroupWise 5, STAR (testing programs for reading and math), and Accelerated Reader.

Building D is part of a site-based management system. The teachers in this building

designed their own writing program. They follow the Illinois Standards and the District Learners' Statements as guides to their instruction. Use of reviewing anchor papers from former students, and Writer's Workshop are incorporated into their teaching.

Community Setting

Community A

Elementary Building A is in Community A, a northwest suburban area of a large city in the midwestern United States. The metropolitan newspaper reports a population of 1,333. Community A's population is made up of the following ethnic backgrounds: 81% of the population is White, 7.1% is Black, 0.6% is Hispanic, and 11.2% is Other (Community Profile, Community A, 1996).

The average adult population age of Community A is 27.6 years old. The average adult male population is 47.2.% and the adult female population is 52.8%. The average household income is $74,375. The number of employed residents in Community A is 62.2%, and 36.7% are not in the labor force. The unemployed population is 1.1%. The housing in Community A is 59.1% single family units and 30.9% multifamily units (Community Profile, Community A, 1996).

The educational attainment of the population consists of 26.5% holding graduate degrees, 42.7% holding Bachelor's degrees, and 13.1% finishing twelfth grade or less (Community Profile, Community A, 1996).

The local school district for Community A consists of one school, an elementary building. District A expends $1,665,478 on education and has an instructional expenditure of $6,671 per pupil. The current community issues are passing a referendum to expand the building, improving teacher salaries, and integrating technology to enhance engaged learning (School Report Card, Building A, 2001).

Community B

Elementary Building B is in Community B, a northwest suburban area of a large city in the midwestern United States. The metropolitan newspaper reports a population of 54,078 people.

Community B's population is made up of the following ethnic backgrounds: 86.3% of the population is White, 0.9% is Black, 6.1% is Hispanic, and 6.7% is Other (Community Profile, Community B, 1997).

The average age of Community B is 37.9 years old. The male population is 49.5% and the female population is 50.5%. The average household income is $86,536. The number of employed residents in Community B is 71.1%, and 26.5% are not in the labor force. The unemployed population is 2.4%. The housing in Community B is 69.1% single family units and 30.9% multifamily units (Community Profile, Community B, 1997).

The educational attainment of the population consists of 41.7% finishing twelfth grade or less, 22.6% holding Bachelor's degrees, and 8.3% holding graduate degrees (Community Profile, Community B, 1997).

The local school district for Community B consists of three schools; two elementary buildings and one middle school building. District B expends $10,760,612 on education and has an instructional expenditure of $3,814 per pupil. The main issue for Community B is a twice failed referendum in 2000 and 2001. District B's referendum will look to pass in November 2002. This referendum would include an increase in teacher salary, a greater expenditure within buildings, an increase and update in the area of technology, and school additions (School Report Card, Building B, 2001).

Community C

Elementary Building C in Community C draws students from 20 surrounding suburban communities. Building C's early childhood student population is comprised of 75% from Community C, and 25% from surrounding communities. The kindergarten through eighth grade population draws 50% of its student population from Community C, and the other 50% comes from surrounding communities. Building C sets up its own demographic reports of the sending communities and makes the report available to all residents, employees, and attendees. Community

C reports a population of 399,481 people. Community C's population is made up of the following ethnic backgrounds: 88.45% of the population is White, 2.81% is Black, 8.14% is Hispanic, and 8.75% is Other (Community Profile, Community C,1998).

The average age of Community C is 34.6 years old. The male population is 49% and the female population is 51%. The average household income is $89,329. The number of employed residents in Community C is 65.2%, and 33.1% are not in the labor force. The unemployed population is 1.7%. The housing in Community C is 86.4% family households,12.9% non-family households, and 0.7% group quarters (Community Profile, Community C, 1998).

The educational attainment of the population consists of 11.9% holding graduate degrees, 25.7% holding Bachelor's degrees, and 22.9% finishing twelfth grade or less (Community Profile, Community C, 1997).

Building C is part of a district of private schools located within the northernmost area of the state. One elementary school from this district resides in Community C. The cost per pupil for instructional expenditure is $3,300 per pupil. The parish church, student tuition, an educational foundation, and donations/grants from private sources provide additional funding. Issues relevant to Building C are improvement of teacher salaries, marketing of the school, and a greater integration of technology in the instructional setting (Community Profile, Community C, 1998).

Community D

Elementary Building D is in Community D, a northwest suburban area of a large city in the midwestern United States. The metropolitan newspaper reports a population of 39,486 people. Community D's population is made up of the following ethnic backgrounds: 92.1% of the population is White, 0.9% is Black, 3.7% is Hispanic, and 3.3% is Other (Community Profile, Community D, 1998).

The average age of Community D is 36.5 years old. The male population is 48.9% and the female population is 51.1%. The average household income is $91,699. The number of employed

residents in Community D is 74.3% and 23.7% are not in the labor force. The unemployed population is 2%. The housing in Community D is 69.2% single family units and 30.8% multifamily units (Community Profile, Community D, 1998).

The educational attainment of the population consists of 11.9% holding graduate degrees, 25.7% holding Bachelor's degrees, and 32.4% finishing twelfth grade or less (Community Profile, Community D, 1998).

The local school district for Community D consists of 20 schools;16 elementary buildings and four junior high buildings. District D expends $82,891,677 on education and has an instructional expenditure of $4,741 per pupil. There are no current community issues that affect District D. Each building is site-based, in which issues and curriculum needs are resolved at a building level (School Report, Building D, 2001).

National Context

Students in elementary schools, both locally and nationally, exhibit poor written communication skills. The students are scoring low on written rubrics and standardized writing tests. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that on a 1998 Written Assessment, 46% of the fourth graders tested were rated with unsatisfactory through uneven scores. The assessment framework and scoring was based on NAEP's six writing goals: purpose, audience, variety of materials, process, organization, and communication. The NAEP encouraged the use of rubrics to assess student work. Rubrics insure, "objective scoring of student work that requires a judgment of character. Teachers...can use guides not only to evaluate student work, but to explain where their work needs improvement" (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2000, p.1).

Motivation is a key factor in the writing process. Elementary school teachers observed that students lack motivation when approaching the writing process, and students lack positive attitudes toward the writing process (Adams, 1996). Students who lack motivation in writing are often

victims of "overload and product driven curriculum" and lack of "modeled writing by adults" (Large & Maholovich, 1997). This overload causes tension, writer's block, and task avoidance behaviors in students, which makes the writing process even more difficult to conquer. There are also questions as to what techniques and methods work best to teach children to write, and, if indeed, good writing can be taught (Graham & Harris, 1997).

Professional literature has suggested that deficiency in writing can be caused by inadequate teacher training. Teachers who lack sufficient training in the teaching of the writing process often use past ineffective practices, and do not integrate writing skills across the curriculum (Adams, 1996). Teachers feel pressured by the mandates of state writing assessments and are unable to make changes in instructional practices if they have not received supportive staff development in writing instruction. Teachers are then left to succeed or fail along with their students in the writing process. Teachers who are knowledgeable and effective in teaching the writing process are able to focus more of their instruction on teaching writing (Bridge, Compton-Hall & Cantrell, 1997). Teachers who incorporate best practices with realistic writing examples increase their students' writing ability (Boersma & Dye, 1997).

Traditional approaches for teaching writing are often viewed as asking students to write sentences using vocabulary and punctuation marks correctly. Students are often given little guidance other than initial prompts and reminders to heed necessary conventions. Teachers make students aware of good writing techniques through focused questions and daily practices of editing skills in structured and unstructured writing. Students need to have parameters to guide their writing and help them focus on the ideas they wish to express.

Time spent on allowing students to engage in the writing process is also of concern. Students need to practice in order to acquire writing skills. Unstructured free writing and formalized structured writing are necessary in order to produce fluent writers. Use of rubric scoring provides students guidance in the process (Boersma, 1997). With rubrics, the scores are

broken down into meaningful and consistent suggestions rather than numeric driven scores.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to identify and document the weak writing skills that interfere with students' overall writing achievement and accompanying poor attitudes towards writing, the researchers developed the Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A), administered a Writing Attitude Survey (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000), and Writing Attitude Survey, Part Two (Appendix B). The researchers administered the Student Writing Prompt (Appendix C) which asked students to describe their favorite season. The Fourth Grade Writing Rubric was used to assess the writing prompt. These assessments were administered in September 2001. Written permission for participation was obtained from the parents (Appendices D and E), and confidentiality was insured through survey anonymity.

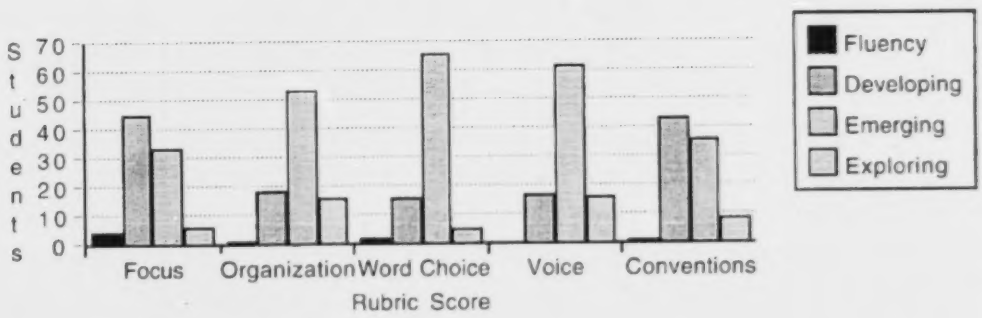

Figure 1: Writing Rubric Results, September 2001

Figure 1 shows the five components of the Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A): focus, organization, word choice, voice, and conventions. Students from the four schools were evaluated and scores were compiled ranging between the lowest score, exploring, to the highest score, fluency. This pre-intervention data indicated low fluency of writing with most of the skills in the emerging stage.

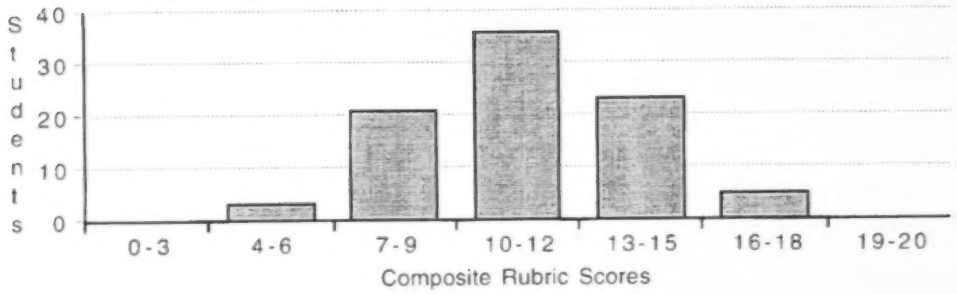

Figure 2: Fourth Grade Writing Rubric Composite Scores, September 2001

Figure 2 shows the composite scores which were compiled from the researchers' classrooms. The majority of students scored below 15, the average, which indicated that the fourth grade students were not able to attain this average score on the rubric. These fourth graders were emerging in their writing skills, thus this graph indicates there is room for growth in of writing.

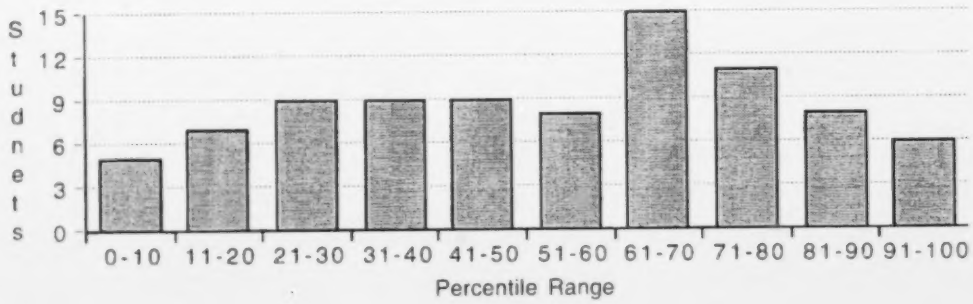

Figure 3: Writing Attitude Survey Percentiles, September 2001

The administration of the final pre-intervention strategy indicated to the researchers that were a wide range of attitudes toward writing among the targeted students. According to the percentile ranks by grade and scale written by Kear, et al., for the Writing Attitude Survey, student scores between 61 and 70 indicated an indifference toward writing. The most common percentile score in the September 2001 survery was between 61 and 70, which indicated an indifferent attitude toward writing.

In the Writing Attitude Survey, Part 2 (Appendix B) the researchers asked the students three questions about writing in order to further assess their attitude toward this skill. Question one asked, "What is my favorite kind of writing?" Most students responded that their favorite kind of writing was stories which included themes of adventure, fantasy, mystery, and fiction. Poetry was also listed as a favorite. The second question asked was, "What is the best thing that I ever wrote?" In this category, an overwhelming majority of the students felt that their best stories involved personal narratives which were both written and shared with their classes. Question three asked the students to describe the steps used in the writing process. The researchers were not surprised to find that most students could not recall any steps of the process. Some responses indicated an awareness of beginning, middle, and end. However, the steps in the writing process could not be described by the students.

Probable Causes

Site Based

Four fourth grade teachers observed three probable causes of weak writing skills within their classrooms. Although they teach in four separate schools, all agreed the probable causes were similar. Problem evidence was observed when student enter the classroom at various levels of writing skills. This problem may be related to the fact that students come from several different third grade classrooms. The third grade teachers may not be consistent in the manner in which they teach writing skills. Some students are well prepared to write at a fourth grade level and others lack the necessary skills to write well. Secondly, students often exhibit a poor attitude toward writing. The hue and cry of students is often, "I hate writing!" or "I never know what to write!" Students avoid the writing task and often show little effort in composing their pieces as long as they finish them quickly. Motivation to write is sorely lacking and often non-existent. Throughout the schools the practice in various kinds of writing is given a low-level priority due to the time constraints of teaching a full curriculum. Students are given opportunities to write only when a product is

produced, and little emphasis is given to teaching the writing process and the improvement of specific writing skills.

Literature Based

The literature suggests several underlying causes for the weak writing skills of fourth grade students. According to Schirmer and Bailey (2000), students need to use a rubric when writing in order to help them recognize some qualities of writing and incorporate these qualities into their own compositions. Students are often left to compose on their own with no framework in which to develop their piece of writing. "The rubric helps the children to recognize that writing incorporates many qualities of writing and not just the few qualities with which they struggle, and the rubric helps children to become metacognitive writers who are able to reflect on the qualities of writing" (Schirmer, 2000, p. 58). Montgomery (2000) suggests that the teaching of writing skills does not automatically allow students to recognize when they need to use these skills. Having a rubric available provides thorough descriptions of each level of their performance in terms of what they are able to do.

Another cause of weak writing skills includes the poor attitudes that students exhibit toward writing. Students often view themselves as incompetent writers, and thus a low level of engagement occurs in their writing. Kear (2000) suggests that as students move from grade to grade their attitudes toward writing generally worsens. Students come to realize that writing is an effort, and often involves lack of choice and tedium. Thus teachers face an uphill battle as they attempt to foster positive writing attitudes in their students.

Modeling of the writing process is often inconsistent for students. This creates another probable cause for weak writing skills. Teachers often do not take the time to model writing before they teach the skills needed to write well. Time constraints often cloud this issue as curricular demands bypass needed modeling of the process of writing. Large (1997) suggests that a probable cause for lack of student motivation and progress in writing is lack of modeled writing by adults.

Teachers need to model the writing process in small increments so that students are able to assimilate the complexities of the writing process into their own cognitive arenas.

According to Bridge, Compton-Hall and Cantrell (1997), students have problems synthesizing writing skills. "Teachers reported that they rarely used higher-level writing activities that involved students in writing discourse-level texts requiring them to generate their own words and ideas. Rather, they most frequently assigned transcription activities in which students filled in words in workbooks and worksheets, copied sentences and poems from the chalkboard, made lists of spelling words, and practiced writing their spelling words" (Bridge, 1997, p. 151). Students lack practice in creating their own compositions in which they are required to think and analyze information, create answers, and use information for decision making in their writing. Isolated writing skills need to be brought together so students can synthesize them as a framework for their writing tasks.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Improving writing skills for all elementary students is a major concern of educators today. Research shows these students require multifaceted instruction throughout the writing process in order for them to become successful and competent writers. Teachers need to create an environment conducive to writing, including, a writing workshop, with multiple opportunities for choice, response, and publication. They need to take stock of the writing process movement as it has evolved in recent years and recognize teacher knowledge of genre, of conventions, of writing strategies and of effective writing behaviors also has a place in writing workshops (Taylor, 2000). It has also been recognized students need to become involved in the writing process as partners with educators. When teachers use rubrics for assessing students' writing performance levels, the students have a clearer picture of what is expected. When students become knowledgeable about these expectations in their writing, their attitudes toward writing improve and links between motivation and literacy is noted (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000).

The following intervening strategies mentioned in the literature review were used as ways to improve writing skills: continuous modeling of the writing process, use of rubrics to define expectations, making writing purposeful, providing opportunities for various types of writing, training teachers and improving students' attitudes through teacher intervention.

Continuous Modeling of the Writing Process Produces Better Writers

Literature supports the need for teachers to model the writing process for their students. It is especially important for students to understand what is expected of them. Using a rubric is beneficial as one models writing. Skillings agrees that the repeated practice of working through the set of criteria and the modeling done by the classroom teacher both contribute to the effectiveness of the writing process for all learners (Skillings & Ferrell, 2000). As students see how their teacher

handles the frustrations, excitement, and process of writing, they will grow to be more confident writers. "Focusing on 'the work' of students means interesting ourselves in the tensions involved both in the acts of producing and in the process themselves" (Taylor, 2000, p. 49). Students will see writing is not always easy, and even adults can become frustrated with a piece of writing. As their teacher models how to work through a difficult moment, students will be inspired to persevere.

Many children feel writing is very hard and do not like it. In a study done by Burkhalter (1995), a comparison was made between the developmental theories of Piaget and Vygotsky as related to persuasive writing for fourth grade students. Piaget believed students are unable to perform a task requiring formal-operational thinking before the age of 11, which consequently suggests they cannot write persuasively. Vygotsky, however, believed students should be taught at their potential cognitive level so they may achieve what seemed beyond their ability. This study attempted to prove Vygotsky's idea would work for fourth grade children, with adult and peer support. The three major finding in this study were the following: With instruction, children as young as nine can improve their ability to write persuasively; girls perform better than boys in writing in general; and all students have the most difficulty with warrants (adding supportive details). These results indicate that we can use a more dynamic approach to learning, such as Vygotsky's social-interactional approach. Teaching in this way can trigger children's potential through adult assistance rather than a more rigid approach based on curriculum design determine what students are capable of doing (Burkhalter, 1995). Teachers need to model these higher level writing skills so students can be ready to reach their next potential level. Students in one classroom will have varying levels of writing skills and attitudes. It is the job of a teacher to address each level and encourage students to move through these levels utilizing both demonstrations and conferences.

Using Rubrics Define Writing Expectations

Most students need the structured framework of expectations in many areas of the curriculum, and this is especially true in writing. Rubrics provide the answers to many questions students have about assignments they are given. With writing, students can be a part of the development and implementation of a rubric that can serve as their guide. Schirmer defines a writing rubric as a tool in which several traits of writing are identified as representing important qualities, and a scale is developed for each trait (Schirmer & Bailey, 2000).

Several researchers found the use of writing rubrics made a difference in students' writing. Boersma (1997) conducted a study of five fourth grade classes in Illinois over a period of six months. In this study, teachers modeled how to create and decide on criteria for students to use to self-assess their writing. The researchers indicated 24% of these fourth grade students improved their overall writing ability, due in part to self-evaluation using rubrics. Another research group agreed using a rubric as a teaching strategy significantly improved several traits of writing for both the fifth and seventh graders studied, but did not improve other traits (Schirmer & Bailey, 2000). Project Zero (2001) found a treatment group was given a rubric and the control group was not. The results of this study indicated agreement with Boersma. The differences between the control group and treatment group suggest the students who received instructional rubrics had more knowledge of what counts in good writing and of the criteria by which their essays were evaluated (Project Zero, 2001). Rubrics truly make a difference for both students and educators. Teachers work hard to help students understand the process of writing, and use rubrics to to be fair and consistent with assessment. "They provide the teacher with a bridge between instruction and assessment, a bridge that it traversed back and forth" (Schirmer & Bailey, 2000, p. 55).

Increasing Frequency of Writing and Lengthening Time of Writing

Literature supports the idea practice in writing produces better writers. In a follow-up study conducted by Bridge, Compton-Hall, and Cantrell (1997), data was collected by surveying

elementary teachers in a Kentucky school district, observing teachers' writing instruction, and targeting two students' writing activities in two classrooms at three grade levels in two schools, totaling 12 classrooms over the period of one year. "The percentage of time that elementary students spend writing and that teachers spend teaching writing has approximately doubled since 1982" (Bridge, Compton-Hall, & Cantrell, 1997, p. 163). The results from this study indicate that as students spent more time writing, their skills improved. These researchers also found that teachers placed more emphasis on writing due to the demands of statewide testing in writing. Students need to practice writing in order to become competent and confident writers. Graham and Harris (1997) suggest it is difficult to imagine that students will develop the knowledge, skill, will, and self-regulation underlying effective writing without encouragement to write frequently and for extended periods of time. The researchers go on to say in order for this time to be of merit, the writing must be valued by the student and therefore become self-regulated.

Making Writing Purposeful

When writers compose pieces, they have an intended purpose. In order for children to become better writers they "must have a keen sense of audience" (Wyngaard & Gehrke, 1996, p. 67). One approach to developing a sense of audience is through constructive peer editing. Teaching peers to give and receive objective responses about their writing emphasizes style, audience, and voice. To write well is to provoke a response from an audience (Power & Ohanian, 1999). The peer comments and reflections are based on a grading rubric shapes the strengths and weaknesses of a written piece in a focused and productive manner. The response gives the writer objective feedback about what the audience actually took away from the paper (Wyngaard & Gehrke, 1996). Writers learn how their audiences react to their pieces, and then adapt the piece. "Presenting themselves to an audience is a powerful incentive" (Wyngaard & Gehrke, 1996, p. 68). Gaining student interest in different styles of writing is only half the battle, practice is the other half (McCarty, 1994). The emergence of writing through letters, lists, essays, responses, and journaling

makes writing an everyday reality. Each element of writing portrays a different style, audience, and purpose for writing. Several sources supported the idea that students' best writing is based on their prior experiences. Their purpose is "motivated by writing on topics that affect them, it is then their writing becomes purposeful" (Power & Ohanian, 1999, p. 251).

Providing More Opportunities for Various Types of Writing

The commitment to integrate uses of language and build on tacit competencies remain the goal of educators across the nation (Strickland et al., 2001). Many educators begin their careers by using skill oriented curriculum. Skill orientation is drill and practice of format, mechanics, and rules of writing. This method of teaching leaves student work dull and uneventful. Movement toward performance standards describes what students need to do in order achieve excellence (Strickland, 2001). Performance standards enable educators to provide more opportunities for students to write for specific purposes. The National Center for Education Statistics (NAEP) Writing Framework explains that students need to write for a variety of purposes. NAEP also states "Students should write from a variety of stimulus materials and within various time constraints" (NAEP, 2000, p. 1).

According to McElveen and Dierking (2000) another strategy for providing various types of writing is through children's literature.

> When students are immersed in a literature-rich environment and participate in daily writing, they can develop 'writerly' thinking and language. Teachers who consistently share and discuss effective writing techniques found in children's literature facilitate opportunities for their students to think speak and write like writers (p. 364).

The rich literature helps make connections to the child's own personal experiences in his or her writing. This transformation of writing gives the students an essential way of knowing and coming to know writing (Reising, 1997). The researcher goes on to report that writing is communication and education work that lead to success and fulfillment in the world. Without the exposure and practice in the many genres of writing the students would lack the essential tools to become

successful in the real world.

Teachers Need More Training in Writing

When educators were asked why can not school teachers effectively teach students how to write, the answers that followed were "inadequate teacher training, lack of support, and poor student preparation in grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation" (Carter, 1997, p. 58). Eight out of ten teachers reported extreme frustration when teaching writing. Teachers found skills, experiences, and styles of writing to be the focus of the problems (Jackson, 1996). Educators reported their schooling and school districts spent very little time educating them about the writing process. A follow up study on the obstacles to the effective teaching of writing, spanning over 20 years, saw no change in teacher training of writing. "Surrounding 'new initiatives' and 'national agendas' with billions of dollars spent on computer labs, inservice training, back-to-basics, competency testing and such, the way writing teachers are being trained has changed very little" (Carter, 1997, p. 60). Authors suggest methods of improving student writing through journaling, demand writing, reflections, and reporting of personal experiences. Each article suggests educators model the process with the students, and thus hurdle the obstacle of inadequate training.

Improving student attitude toward writing

Children's attitudes, values, beliefs, and motivation for writing are areas of interest for educators (Bottomly, Henk & Melnick, 1998). A child's self-perception of their writing ability affects his or her subsequent writing growth. Four factors have been identified which contribute to writing ability. They include performance, observational comparison, social feedback, and psychological states (Bottomly, 1998). Educators are challenged to determine their students' attitudes toward writing because of the link between motivation and literacy learning (Kear et al., 2000).

In an attempt to measure student writing attitude, Kear et al. created a five-level Likert scale. The scale enabled students to score their pre- and post-attitudes towards writing. This instrument

was then administered to a sampling of 974 students in grades one through 12 in several school districts in the midwestern United States. Students who displayed low attitude scores displayed low writing ability. The inverse held true for positive attitudes and writing ability. Kear et al. concluded poor writing students displayed resistance to the writing process which could be caused by fear, indifference, or limited writing experiences. When instructors identify poor attitudes in their poor writers, Kear et al. suggests instructors become aware and increase writing opportunities. In addition, to combat poor attitudes, teachers should:

> (a) provide an initial indicator of a student's attitude toward writing, (b) give a pre- and post-measurement score of attitude toward writing, (c) collect an attitudinal profile for a class or group of research participants, or (d) serve as a way to monitor the impact of an instructional program in writing (Kear et al., 2000, p. 14).

Project Objectives and Processes

Objective One

As a result of providing multifaceted instruction throughout the writing process, during the period of September 2001 to December 2001, the fourth grade students from the targeted classes will increase their writing achievement, as measured by the Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A).

In order to accomplish the objective, increasing writing achievement, the following processes are necessary:

1. Administer a pre- and post- Student Writing Prompt (Appendix C).
2. Writing rubrics will be used when assessing student writing.
3. Teachers will continually model the writing process.
4. Teachers will expose students to different types of writing.
5. Frequency and duration of writing will increase.
6. Teachers will propose writing that is real and meaningful.

7. Students will journal three to five times a week.

Objective Two

As a result of focusing on the improvement of writing, during the period of September 2001 to December 2001, the fourth grade students from the targeted fourth grade classes will improve their attitude toward writing, as measured by the Writing Attitude Survey (WAS) (Appendix B) and teacher observations. In order to accomplish the the objectives, improvement of student attitude in writing the following processes are necessary:

1. Administration of pre- and post-WAS (Appendix B).
2. Teachers will expose students to different types of writing.
3. Teachers will propose writing that is real and meaningful.

Project Action Plan

Researchers will be using seven types of writing throughout the 14 week intervention (Taylor, 2000). Narrative, expository, persuasive, letters and poetry will be instructional. Journal and reflective writing will be experiential. Due to the researchers' locations at four different sites, the instructional and experiential writing will be taught in varying sequences in order to accommodate the researchers and their district guidelines. The researchers will integrate these types of writing into their lessons as they teach and model the Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F). The breakdown of the exposure to the writing process is as follows:

Narrative Writing: nine 30 minute lessons

Expository Writing: nine 30 minute lessons

Persuasive Writing: nine 30 minute lessons

Letters and Poetry: five 30 minute lessons

Journal Writing: three to five times per week for five to 15 minute sessions

Reflective Writing: one to two times per week for five to 15 minute sessions

Topics are created based on student interest, curriculum topics, local and school current

events, and themes throughout the year (McCarty, 1994).

September

Week 1:

- Administer: WAS (Kear, Coffman, McKenna & Ambrosio, 2000) (Appendix B)
- Administer: Student Writing Prompt "Season" (Appendix C)

Week 2:

- Model: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "Brainstorming / Prewriting"
- Writing topics of interest to students (Graham & Harris,1997)

Week 3:

- Model: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "Introduction" (Large & Maholovich, 1997)
- Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)- "Focus"

Week 4:

- Practice: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "Introduction"
- Practice: Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)- "Focus"

October

Week 5:

- Model: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "First Draft" (Downing, 1995)
- Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)- "Organization"

Week 6:

- Practice: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "First Draft"
- Practice: Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)- "Organization"

Week 7:

- Model: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "Revising/Conferencing" (Bridge, Compton-Hall & Cantrell, 1997)

- Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)- "Word Choice and Voice" (Wyngaard & Gehrke, 1996)

Week 8:

- Practice: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "Revising/Conferencing"
- Practice: Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)- "Word Choice and Voice" (Schirmer & Bailey, 2000)

Week 9:

- Model: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "Second Draft/ Editing" (Downing, 1995)
- Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)- "Conventions"

November

Week 10:

- Practice: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "Second Draft/ Editing"
- Practice: Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)- "Conventions"

Week 11:

- Model: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "Publishing" (Power & Ohanian, 1999)
- Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)- "Self Assessment" (Skillings & Ferrell, 2000)

Week 12:

- Practice: Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)- "Publishing"
- Practice: Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)- "Self Assessment"

December

Week 13:

- Practice: entire Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F)
- Practice: entire Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A)

Week 14:

- Administer: WAS (Kear et al., 2000) (Appendix B)
- Administer: Student Writing Prompt "Season" (Appendix C)

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, a Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A) and Writing Attitude Survey (Appendix B) measuring pre- and post-interventions will be developed and administered. In addition, a teacher journal including reflections will be part of the assessment process.

Chapter 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The objective of the researchers, to improve writing skills of fourth graders and their attitudes toward writing, was accomplished in a variety of ways. A writing rubric was developed to assess student writing. Teachers modeled the writing process and exposed students to different types of writing. In addition, the frequency and duration of student writing increased, teachers proposed real and meaningful writing, and students journaled three to five times each week. The components of this action plan took place between August 2001 and December 2001. In order to inform parents that the researchers would be implementing strategies designed to improve writing skills, a parental consent letter was sent home with each student (Appendix D & E). During the first week of school, parents were given details of the research study and gave written consent for their children to participate. Of the consent letters issued, 100% were signed and returned.

A student Writing Attitude Survey (Appendix B) was given to each student the second week of school. The purpose of this survey was to identify personal feelings of each student towards writing, the writing process, and their opinions about their own abilities. A second survey was given at the end of the intervention in order to identify any attitude changes. A pre- and post-Student Writing Prompt (Appendix C) was also administered along with the survey.

In order to consistently assess student writing, the researchers developed a Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A). Targeted areas included focus, organization, word choice, voice, and conventions. These were specifically chosen in order to efficiently assess overall writing ability. Students were given individual copies of the Fourth Grade Writing Rubric to use throughout this intervention

Researchers continually modeled the Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F). This was taught daily in small increments across all curricular areas. Researchers helped the students

assimilate the complexities of the writing process into their own cognitive areas.

During the intervention, students were also exposed to different types of writing. These included narrative, expository, persuasive, letters, poetry, journal writing, and reflective writing. Topics for these types of writing were based on student interests, various curricular topics, and local and school current events.

In addition, frequency and duration of writing opportunities for students increased from the usual practice. Researchers engaged students in daily writing ranging from 5 to 45 minutes. These frequent writing experiences included journal writing, writing prompts, assigned writing, and free writing. Researchers wanted student writing skills to improve and this type of practice aided students in becoming competent and confident writers.

Proposing writing that is real and meaningful was essential in creating a writing-rich environment. Components of this intervention included writers composing pieces that had intended purposes and a sense of audience. Through the writing of letters, lists, essays, and responses, the researchers hoped to make writing an everyday reality for their students.

Students were given opportunities to write in their journals in both formalized-structured writing experiences as well as unstructured free writing experiences. The formalized structured experiences included thematically-based writing projects and developmentally appropriate frameworks. For example, students wrote a narrative piece about a time they were frightened. They wrote these narratives relating to a topic studied in reading.

The unstructured free writing experiences included frequent journal writing to foster effective writing ideas. Often no restrictions were made on subject, length, or spelling abilities. When a social problem or situation occurred in class, students were often asked to respond and reflect in their journals before a class discussion ensued. This journal writing provided a powerful incentive to practice writing based on their life experience.

All of these interventions were initially scheduled to occur over a 14 week period as stated

in the action plan. However, researchers discovered that although intervention was necessary, the time allotment was insufficient. Initially, the introduction of brainstorming and pre-writing occurred as scheduled. However, the introduction and focus lessons required more than two weeks for the students to master. The first draft component was able to be taught within a week, but the organization component needed more time. The researchers extended this mini-lesson well into the seventh week. Although word choice and voice were new concepts to the students, they were able to incorporate them surprisingly well. The revising/conferencing component also took longer than expected to teach. This mini-lesson continued into Week 11. Second draft/editing, conventions, and publishing were introduced to the students the final two weeks of the study. The researchers never addressed self-assessment as a formal lesson, as indicated in the action plan. However, an informal self-assessment by the students did take place as they edited their pieces. It is the researchers' opinion that more time should be spent on editing and conventions, and less time on publishing.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The results of the Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A) and Attitude Survey (Appendix B) administered in week 14 of the intervention showed many areas of improvement when compared to the data results from week one. All four of the classrooms involved with the intervention showed similar growth and improvement. Benefits included an increase in student writing fluency, an improved composite rubric score, and growth in student attitudes toward writing. One interesting result was significant improvement in the areas of focus, word choice, and conventions.

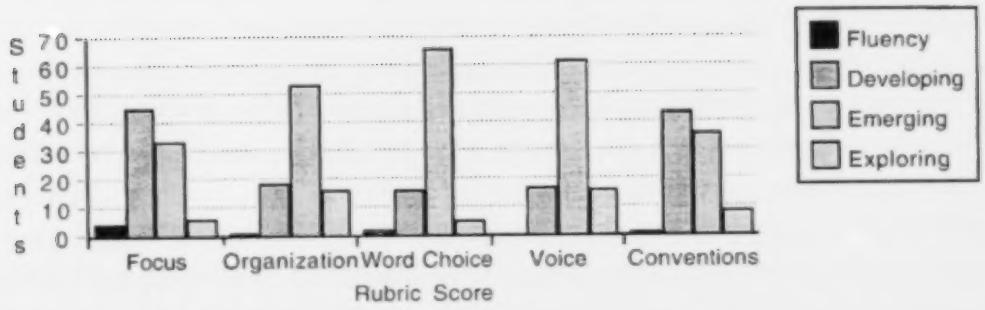

Figure 4: Fourth Grade Writing Rubric Results, September 2001

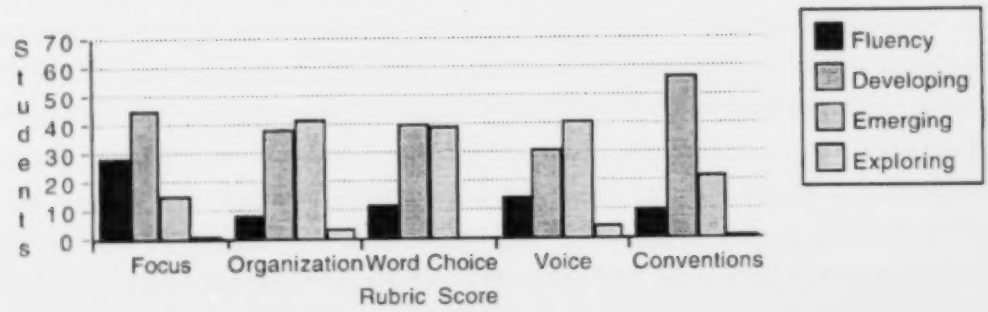

Figure 5: Fourth Grade Writing Rubric Results, December 2001

When the individual components of the Writing Rubric were compared, researchers noted an improved change. In the Writing Rubric area of focus, the fluency score increased from 4 students to 28 students, while the exploring score decreased from 6 students to 1. In the Writing Rubric area of organization, the fluency score increased from 1 student to 8 students, while the exploring score decreased from 16 students to 3. In the Writing Rubric area of word choice, the fluency score increased from 2 students to 12 students, while the exploring score decreased from 5 students to none. In the Writing Rubric area of voice, the fluency score increased from no students to 14 students, while the exploring score decreased from 16 students to 4. In the Writing Rubric area of conventions, the fluency score increased from 1 student to 10 students, while the exploring score decreased from 8 students to 1.

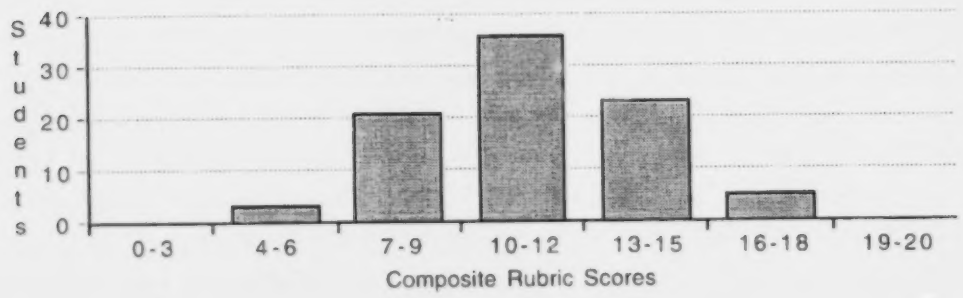

Figure 6: Fourth Grade Writing Rubric Composite Scores, September 2001

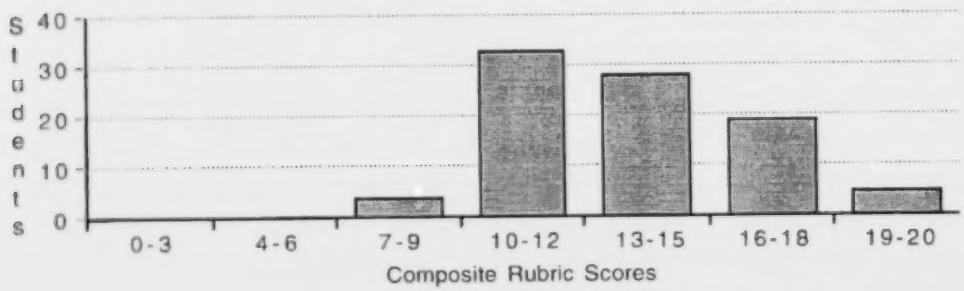

Figure 7: Fourth Grade Writing Rubric Composite Scores, December 2001

When students' composite scores in week 14 were compared with scores from week 1, there were notable changes. Eighty-three students scored below average in week 1, while 65 students scored below average in week 14. The above average range, scores of 16-20, increased from 5 students to 24 students. Researchers noticed no students scored in the four to six range, and 17 fewer students scored in the seven to nine range in week 14 than in week 1. In addition, scores from week 14 displayed 5 students scoring in the 19-20 range, while there were no students scoring in the range during week 1.

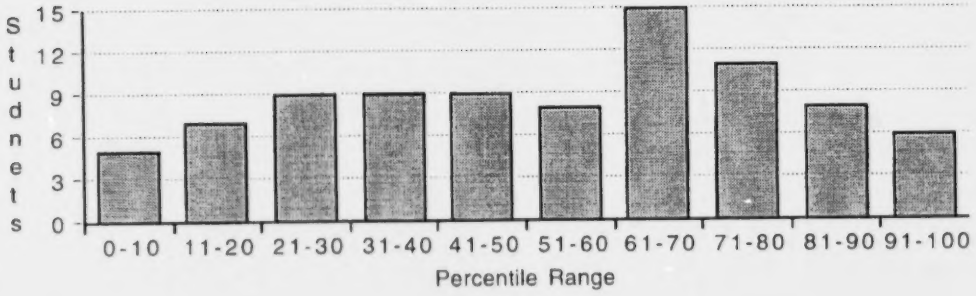

Figure 8: Writing Attitude Survey Percentiles, September 2001

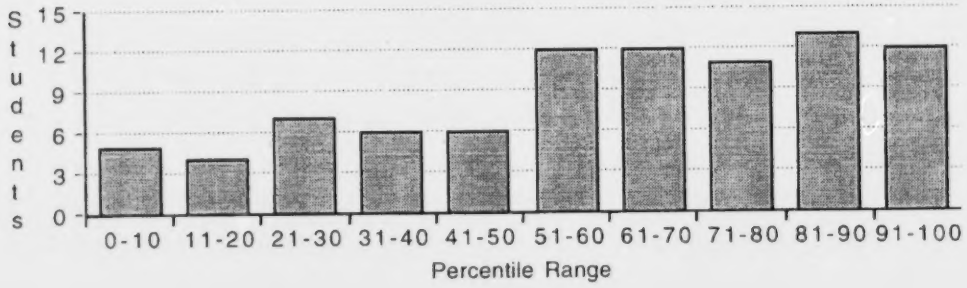

Figure 9: Writing Attitude Survey Percentiles, December 2001

The Writing Attitude Survey administered post-intervention showed an increase in positive attitudes toward writing. Thirty-nine students scored in the zero to 50 range in week one while 28 students scored in that range in week 14. Forty-eight students scored in the 51 to 100 range in week one, while 60 students scored in the same range in week 14.

In the Writing Attitude Survey, Part 2, the researchers asked the students three questions about writing in order to further assess their attitudes toward this skill. Question one asked, "What is my favorite kind of writing?" During week one students responded that their favorite kinds of writing were stories which included themes of adventure, fantasy, mystery, fiction, and poetry. The week 14 assessment had similar favorites and included the addition of humor, riddles, comics, and

jokes. The second question asked was, "What is the best thing that I ever wrote?" In this category, an overwhelming majority of the students in the first week felt that their best writings involved personal narratives which were both written and shared with their classes. The week 14 survey revealed personal narratives, persuasive, poetry, and letters as their best pieces of writing. Question three asked the students to describe the steps used in the writing process. The researchers were not surprised to find that most students could not recall any steps of the process during the initial survey. Some initial responses indicated an awareness of beginning, middle, and end. However, the steps in the writing process could not be described. The concluding survey of the steps in the writing process were more clearly defined as brainstorming, introduction, first draft, editing, and publishing. Week 14 results showed students had a clear understanding of the Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F). The researchers noted the majority of students omitted the revising and conferencing step of the process.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Upon reviewing the data and analyzing the results, the researchers concluded that when students are instructed in writing with a purposeful and multi-faceted approach, writing achievement will increase. The researchers believe that using mini-lessons, which focused on the various components of writing, helped students to better understand the various parts of the writing process. The calendar of weekly lessons and practice helped to keep both teachers and students on schedule. It was noted by the researchers that the frequent practice of a writing skill aided the students in transferring the skill to the writing process in most pieces of writing. The researchers concurred that the use of mini-lessons were an excellent way to differentiate instruction in the writing class. The development and implementation of the Fourth Grade Writing Rubric (Appendix A) served as a guide for the students as they progressed through the Fourth Grade Writing Process (Appendix F). The data indicated all targeted areas increased with the largest improvement occurring in the areas of focus and word choice.

The researchers also concluded that attitudes toward the writing process could be changed as teachers exposed students to different types of writing which were real and meaningful. The attitude survey was an effective tool to initially assess the attitudes of writing within the classroom. This survey gave teachers a baseline from which to implement their study, and the findings indicated the students' attitudes toward writing could be changed. The researchers were particularly pleased that the range of scores were concentrated toward the positive end of the percentile ranks.

There were several differences noted when the actual interventions were compared to the initial plan. The researchers noted the abilities of the class needed to be assessed, and a rapport developed within the classroom between the teacher and students, before the actual intervention began. This would allow the teacher to identify the individual needs of the students and pace the lessons appropriately. The planned schedule appeared to give enough time for practice of the various writing components and types of writing. However, after the interventions, this schedule needed to be lengthened by ten to twelve weeks in order to assure students received sufficient practice in writing. The researchers also needed to take into account the various periods of time when students were not in school due to holidays, conferences, in-services, state testing, and illness. Lastly, the Student Writing Prompt (Appendix C) provided a way to assess the students' growth in writing during the course of the intervention.

There was an consensus among the researchers that this intervention would be used again in their classrooms and in those of their colleagues. The actual research allowed the teachers to see first-hand how important it is that students practice writing frequently and have exposure to various types of writing. The excitement that the results generated allowed the researchers to share their positive results with other teachers. It was decided that encouraging all teachers to work with the same rubric would greatly enhance the consistency of teaching the writing components. The calendar of mini-lessons would be a valuable asset to other teachers who could incorporate their lessons into the validated research framework. It was also suggested that the rubric and calendar be

implemented at third and fifth grade levels in order that students entering and exiting fourth grade would receive instruction that was built on a shared, spiraling, writing curriculum. The use of the writing prompt was also a tool that teachers could include in portfolios or writing folders to exhibit the growth of their students' writing throughout the year.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Fourth Grade Writing Rubric

Criteria	4 - Fluency	3 - Developing	2 - Emerging	1 - Exploring
Focus	· My topic shows relevance throughout	· I have stayed focused on my topic	· My ideas don't all relate to my topic	· I don't know what my topic should be
Organization	· I have an engaging introduction (hook) · I have an effective conclusion that wraps up my writing · I have used paragraphs appropriately, including dialogue · I have used complex transitions	· My introduction sets a purpose · I have a clear closing · I used paragraphs appropriately · I have used simple transitions	· My reader understands the general idea of my introduction · I may have a conclusion · I have attempted to paragraph my paper appropriately	· I'm not sure where I'm headed · I do not have an ending
Word Choice and Effective Use of Language	· My use of detailed language enhances my writing	· My reader understands and "sees" what I'm saying	· I have used basic language	· My language is unclear
Voice and Creativity	· I have made a strong connection with my reader · I have taken risks with my writing	· My personality comes through in my writing · I have created a clear picture in my reader's mind	· I am starting to develop my own writing style	· My personality is not present in my writing
Conventions	· My written work is well edited and polished	· I have used correct grammar and word usage · My spelling is generally correct	· My grammatical errors are distracting to the reader	· I'm not sure what a sentence is

Appendix B

Name _____

Writing Attitude Survey, Part 2

Please answer the following questions about writing.

1. What is my favorite kind of writing?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What is the best thing that I ever wrote?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Describe the steps used in the writing process.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C

Student Writing Prompt

You will have twenty minutes to complete a writing sample.

I will let you know when there are five minutes left.

Write a paragraph describing your favorite season.

Appendix D

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Improving Fourth Grade Students' Writing Skills and Attitudes

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently enrolled in a master's degree program at Saint Xavier University. This program requires me to design and implement a project on an issue that directly affects my instruction. I have chosen to examine strategies in the area of writing and student attitude toward writing.

The purpose of this project is to help students become more confident writers across the curriculum. This project will help the students internalize the writing process, as well as increase their writing skills.

I will be conducting my project from September 2001 through December 2001. The activities related to the project will be part of our regular classroom learning activities. This study will in no way take away from the district-adopted writing curriculum. The strategies I will be using with your children are strategies I have studied about in researching this topic.

In order to include your student in the reporting of information for my project, I need your signed permission. All information gather will be kept confidential, and information included in the report will be stated so that no individual results can be identified. No names or school locations will be used. The gathering of information for my project during these activities offers no risks of any kind to your child. The report will be used to share what I have learned as a result of this project with other professionals in the field of education.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participated, information gathered about your student will not be included in the report.

If you have any questions or would like further information about my project, please contact me at school.

Sincerely,

Appendix E

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Improving Fourth Grade Students' Writing Skills and Attitudes

I, _____, the parent/legal guardian of the minor named below, acknowledge that the researcher has explained to me the purpose of this research, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my child's participation. I freely and voluntarily consent to my child's participation in this project. I understand all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential. I also understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form for my own information.

NAME OF MINOR: _____

_____

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian Date

Appendix F

Fourth Grade Writing Process

- **Brainstorming / Prewriting**
  Purpose: to tap prior knowledge
  Example: graphic organizers, lists, outlines

- **Introduction**
  Purpose: write an opening paragraph/section
  Example: hook, purpose, audience, focus
  Rubric: "Focus"

- **First Draft**
  Purpose: express ideas / write the body and conclusion
  Example: organization, paragraphing / sectioning, details, conclusion
  Rubric: "Organization"

- **Revising / Conferencing**
  Purpose: to refine writing piece
  Example: transitions, vocabulary, voice
  Rubric: "Word Choice / Voice & Creativity"

- **Second Draft / Editing**
  Purpose: to "clean-up" the writing product/piece
  Example: conventions, fill in student rubric
  Rubric: "Conventions"

- **Publish**
  Purpose: to share and reflect on writing
  Example: oral reading, creating books, presentations, reflections
  Rubric: Whole rubric assessment

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